



THE BEACON



By and for emergency responders

DOMESTIC PREPAREDNESS PLANNING AND TRAINING COMMITTEES

One of the missions of the National Domestic Preparedness Office (NDPO) is to assist state and local communities across the nation to enhance and improve their level of response to terrorist acts involving Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).

One of the suggested ways to improve state and local WMD response is to form a task force or working group within the community or region which convenes regularly to discuss WMD and other terrorism related issues. In many larger metropolitan communities these task forces or working groups already exist and are very active in planning, training, and exercising the emergency response community in a potential terrorist WMD response. These task forces and WMD working groups allow emergency responders from various response disciplines throughout the community to meet and establish working relationships before an actual incident occurs in the community. These working relationships between emergency responders allow the community to draft response plans and conduct training and exercises to improve their level of response.

While developing specialized task force/working group to focus on a terrorist WMD response may be the best approach, they obviously require a commitment of personnel and time and in many cases a financial obligation from communities who don't have the additional resources. An alternative may be to join other task forces/working groups which already exist within the community and can serve as a forum for promoting domestic preparedness and response to a terrorist WMD incident.



While there are many established forums in the state and local communities whose focus is promoting domestic preparedness and response to a terrorist WMD incident, two established groups which already focus on coordinating and planning for an emergency response in a terrorist WMD incident are the Law Enforcement Coordinating Committee (LECC) and Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC).

The following information will describe the organization and functions of two groups that play important roles in coordinating and planning for local and regional domestic preparedness. John W. Peaden, Law Enforcement Coordinator and Special Assistant to the United States Attorney, Northern District of Florida, contributed information regarding Law Enforcement Coordinating Committees (LECC's), and Charlotte S. Neupauer, Associate Planner, Withlacoochee Regional Planning Council, Ocala, Florida, provided information on Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC's).

LAW ENFORCEMENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE (LECC)

The Law Enforcement Coordinating Committee (LECC) consists of representatives from federal, state and local agencies involved in law enforcement within that federal judicial district. The goal of the LECC is to improve cooperation and coordination of resources among law enforcement agencies, thereby enhancing the overall criminal justice system within the district. The United States Attorney is the chairperson of the LECC and is responsible for the direction the committee will take. The LECC Manager oversees the daily operations of the committee's projects and programs. Every United States Attorney's Office has an LECC, however, the operation is designed specifically for the district. For instance, in the Northern District of Florida there may be more emphasis on military or rural law enforcement efforts, whereas in the Western District of Washington there may be a large focus on the LECC addressing the needs of the Native American tribes.

The Law Enforcement Coordination Program assists in promoting cooperative efforts among all levels of law enforcement through several methods, such as training conferences, assistance with law enforcement grants, Weed and

Seed activities and COPS initiatives. Additionally, the LECC Manager serves as a resource to law enforcement agencies requesting specific information. Membership is open to all law enforcement officials serving within the district and to all Assistant United States Attorneys. In the Northern District of Florida, for example, there are more than 300 law enforcement officers on the LECC list.

The Northern District of Florida's LECC has been nationally recognized as sponsoring some of the best training programs in the country. In the past decade the United States Attorney's Office, Northern District of Florida, has sponsored more than 50 training conferences. These conferences have covered more than 75 topics, including domestic terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), with most conferences featuring nationally known experts. These conferences have proven to be an excellent method of promoting law enforcement efforts within the district. Members meet, socialize, learn new skills, and from this comes cooperation and coordination of a less formalized nature. Networking is encouraged at the conferences and the friendships formed enhance the collaborative nature of the program. The United States Attorney encourages all Assistant U.S. Attorneys and support staff to participate in the LECC training programs as funding permits. The U.S. Attorney also encourages all employees to contact him or the LECC Coordinator if they have suggestions for training programs.

LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE (LEPC)

There are about 4,000 Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs) in the United States. Most LEPCs function at the county level, however, in a few states they are organized regionally. LEPCs convene regularly for planning and discussion of emergency hazard response

issues. LEPCs were originally established as a result of the 1986 Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act (EPCRA) administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The LEPC prepares hazardous materials emergency plans which indicate the facilities that store, use, or produce hazardous substances at or above established threshold amounts. The LEPC also serves as a repository for reports filed under the EPCRA. In addition, the LEPC plays an active role in risk communication, public education, industry outreach, mitigation, and emergency planning associated with the Clean Air Act's Risk Management Planning.

The LEPC can also serve as an excellent forum for addressing WMD domestic preparedness issues as well, due to the broad-based membership of the LEPC. Local and regional firefighters, law enforcement officers, EMS, emergency management, environment and public health officials all convene to address public safety and response concerns caused by a possible hazardous materials release within the planning district, which would include the potential terrorist release of a nuclear, biological or chemical weapon. In fact, LEPCs are structured much the same as the NDPO, focusing on outreach, planning, training and exercises to enhance local and regional awareness and response capabilities.

LEPCs also work closely with local and regional hospitals to enhance their level of preparedness for chemical emergencies. Committees are formed to assess each hospital's level of preparedness for treating victims of a chemical release, including ambulance services. For example, the District V LEPC in Ocala, Florida, developed a Hospital Preparedness Committee and developed guidelines for recommended practices and resources necessary for local hospitals to treat chemical exposure victims. These guidelines were incorporated into a training handbook and accompanying video which was

distributed to all hospitals within the Withlacoochie (Central Florida) Region.

LECCs and LEPCs throughout the country have played an important role in enhancing the nation's level of domestic preparedness against terrorist acts involving WMD. Their planning, training and outreach efforts have helped to increase the awareness levels and response capabilities of emergency responders in every state. The services they provide are a valuable asset to the nation to ensure that we are prepared to respond to a terrorist event involving, chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. The NDPO strongly supports the efforts of the LECCs and LEPCs and encourages emergency responders across the nation to be actively involved in their membership.

*Editors Note: While **The Beacon** has highlighted just one of many active and successful LECC and LEPC committees across the country, there are other communities who have established active committees. The NDPO encourages those communities to contact each other and the NDPO with information for others to consider as they improve and/or begin the LECC and/or LEPC programs.*

THE LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE'S ROLE IN DOMESTIC PREPAREDNESS

When firefighters, paramedics, or law enforcement officers respond to a HAZMAT call, they do not know if they are heading into an incident that was caused by accident or triggered by an act of terrorism. They just know with certainty that lives are at stake, both for the First Responders and to the public. They must have a plan of action as they arrive at the site.

Local jurisdictions are justly proud of their brave men and women who put themselves at risk for their communities and attempt to provide them the best tools available to allow them to get the job done as safely as possible. The jurisdictions are quick to show off to the taxpayers the shiny new fire engines, police cruisers, and ambulances. But an Emergency Response Plan (ERP) of a specific site is the single most important tool for First Responders.

Providing contingency planning for the First Responders and the public is truly the role of the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC). The EPA can provide the legal mandates of why LEPCs were created but it is up to local leadership to provide the vision to see beyond the statues and use the LEPCs as a public-private partnership to prepare communities to save lives and property. While SARA Title III and the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA) requires creation of Emergency Response Plans for “most at risk” facilities, it is the challenge of LEPCs to insure that those plans are accurate, current, and most importantly, distributed to all levels of emergency response. This action starts at the first responder level but also should include neighboring jurisdictions, the State Emergency Response Commission, the National Guard, federal agencies, especially the EPA, HHS, FEMA, and the FBI.

LEPC members are challenged to ensure that the committee not only meets the statutory requirements, but disseminates information to the emergency management community. The committee must stress that the information is as good for risk mitigation as it is for response plans. There is no better response plan than the one that eliminated the risk.

Technology is now available to develop databases so any emergency responder, whether local, state, or federal, can view the emergency

response plans on laptop computers or mobile data terminals in emergency vehicles. Digital plans may also be provided to all public buildings, hospitals, and schools.

Imagine if police were able to quickly view floor plans of local buildings, libraries, etc. Imagine a rookie firefighter walking into a vapor in a train derailment, not being forewarned that he was exposing himself to deadly chlorine. Consider the needs of a fire company responding from a neighboring county to an industrial fire. The local knowledge of a site must be instantly accessible and shared by all responders. LEPCs should lead the way in sharing data between agencies and jurisdictions.

LEPCs have a legal responsibility to work with all agencies of government and with all segments of private industry to identify hazards and provide contingency plans. As the threat of terrorism increases, LEPC members have a moral responsibility to keep our public and our emergency management community informed, prepared, and safe.

Written by Stephen A. Day, who is employed by the AOT-The Public Safety Corporation and is a member of the District of Columbia LEPC and the Howard County, Maryland LEPC. Mr. Day can be reached by e-mail at sday@aot.com.

News Corner

CHEMICAL ATTACK EXERCISE IN NEW MEXICO

This month, the Army conducted a chemical weapon training exercise near Albuquerque, New Mexico. The scenario involved a suspected terrorist detonating a chemical weapon at the New Mexico State Fairgrounds, sending victims into the streets,

coughing, screaming, and begging for help. The "victims" were actually local high school students.

The drill involved hundreds of firefighters, police officers, paramedics, and hospital personnel. The goal was to train the emergency responders to deal with the detonation of a biological or chemical weapon in a crowded area.

Local fire officials reported that the exercise accurately identified strengths and weaknesses in the community's response.

WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

This month's featured website is the Medical NBC (Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical) Defense Information Server located on the Internet at www.nbc-med.org. The site is maintained by the U.S. Army's Office of the Surgeon General and serves as a distributed learning and reference source for medical NBC information.

Medical NBC Online contains a wealth of information on health issues associated with NBC weapons, including documents prepared for easy downloading. For example, users can download copies of the Medical Management of Chemical Casualties Handbook, the Textbook of Military Medicine: Medical Aspects of Chemical and Biological Warfare, as well as several newsletters dedicated to NBC issues.

The site also features a comprehensive training catalog, WMD conference schedule, and news service. The Internet Reference page contains relevant government documents, research papers, and links to various sites related to NBC medical issues.

*Editor's note: The NDPO does not sponsor websites that are featured in **The Beacon**. The website review is strictly used to provide*

information that may be useful to the emergency response community.



**National
Preparedn**

**Domestic
ess Office**

**Director: Mr. Thomas M. Kuker
935 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Rm 11286**

**Washington D.C. 20535
(202) 324-9025
Fax: (202) 324-2224**

***The Beacon* is published monthly for members of the emergency response community. Please send articles, comments, feedback, and letters to the Information Sharing Team at the address listed above.**